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THE REPORT OF THE
METIS TASK FORCE
UPON THE METIS BETTERMENT ACT,
METIS SETTLEMENTS AND THE
METIS REHABILITATION BRANCH

Submitted To
The
GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA
By

T.F. Roach, Chairman and Committee Members:

Clayton Sauve - H.R.D.A. Sociologist

Dave Bates - Emergency Services Director, Department of Social Development

A.R. Isbister - Director, Field Services, Department of Municipal Affairs

Arnold Pepper - Public Service Commission Representative

D.R. Ledgerwood - Department of Education Representative

Representatives Of
The Metis Association of Alberta

Edmonton

February, 1972



THE REPORT OF THE METIS TASK FORCE

In the summer of 1969, the Metis Association approached the Human Resources Development Authority with a proposal to have the Metis Betterment Act, the Metis Settlements and the Metis Rehabilitation Branch examined by a Committee from the Public Service of Alberta. (The committee became known as the METIS TASK FORCE; for brevity; it shall be referred to, simply, as the Committee.) The Committee would work in close co-operation with the Metis Association in the actual examination of the areas of concern.

The Committee was selected and comprised of the following people:

Clayton Sauve - HRDA Sociologist
Dave Bates - Emergency Services Director - Dept. of Soc. Development
A.R. Isbister - Director of Field Services - Dept. of Mun. Affairs
Arnold Pepper - Public Service Commission
D.R. Ledgerwood - Department of Education
A representative from the Metis Association of Alberta

The terms of reference were quite general, enabling the Task Force to include a broad range of concerns in its considerations. Consequently, the study tended to be comprehensive in its approach.

In the interview phase of the study, the Committee visited all of the Settlements and held formal and informal meetings with the residents of each Settlement. The Committee was somewhat restricted in providing full time to the study per se and this, of necessity, mitigated against an early report. Nonetheless, it was probably fortunate that no attempt was made to make an early diagnosis of conditions in the settlements.

A good point from which to begin tracing the history of the Metis Settlement Areas is probably the formation of the Halfbreed Commission of 1899. In the summer of that year, a Treaty Commission, headed by

David Laird travelled through Northern Alberta to 'make treaty' with the Indian tribes living in that part of the North West Territories. The Indians were offered and accepted: money; land; the basic materials for farming, ranching, hunting, and fishing; and schools. Each person received \$12.00 at the signing and \$5 per year afterwards. The chiefs received \$25 per year, a silver medal, a flag, a suit of clothes every three years, and axes and tools for house building. The counsellors were given \$15 per year and a suit of clothes (not quite as good as that of the chiefs) every three years. For land they were given a choice: either 640 acres per family of 5 in a reserve or 160 acres for each person wherever they wished. They were given ploughs, harrows, hoes, etc.; bulls and cows; ammunition and fish net twine. They were assured of schools and the freedom to hunt and fish all over. ^{1/}

David Laird explained to the Indians and Halfbreeds that the Halfbreeds living like Indians could sign the Treaty with the Indians if they wished to do so. For those not wishing to sign and those living like whites, the Halfbreed Commissioners were present to issue scrip, but only after the Treaty was signed. "If there is no Treaty made, scrip cannot be given," was a strong bargaining point for the Dominion Government. The Halfbreed Commission was composed of Major Walker (a retired ~~MP~~), Mr. Cote', Mr. Pruchomma (secretary) and Mr. Mair (secretary). Their offer to the halfbreeds was: 160 acres to those living on land (not clear if this was per person or per family); to the others either a scrip to the value of \$240 which could be sold for cash, or a land scrip for 240 acres which had to be applied against a piece of land and

1/ Charles Mair; Through the MacKenzie Basin, William Briggs, Toronto, 1903, pp. 56-58.

then the land could be sold if desired. 1/

The basis for giving scrip to the halfbreeds was an aboriginal claim: "The reason the Government does this is because the halfbreeds have Indian blood in their veins, and have claims on that account. The Government does not make Treaty with them, as they live as white men do, so it gives them scrip to settle their claims at once and forever." 2/

The Halfbreed Commission travelled from Edmonton to Grouard, Dunvegan, Fort Vermilion, Fort Chipewyan, Fort McMurray, Wabasca, Calling Lake, and back to Edmonton, taking up spring, summer and fall of 1899. They issued scrip at various points en route - a total of 1,843 of which only 48 were for land. 3/

The overwhelming choice for money scrip may perhaps be understood in light of the historic circumstances of the event. The halfbreeds were not farmers or ranchers, and land was plentiful everywhere. In spite of opposing advice from Fr. Lacombe, they preferred "...the bird in the hand....". 4/ In terms of dollars, the halfbreeds were given \$430,880 by the Commission, of which an unknown fraction was realized by the halfbreeds. In the same party as the Commissioners were brokers from Winnipeg and Edmonton to purchase the scrip "...at a great reduction, of course, from face value....". 5/

1/ Mair; op. cit. pp. 58-59

2/ Ibid p. 58

3/ Ibid p. 145

4/ Ibid p. 68

5/ Ibid p. 68

Thirty-three years later, a number of responsible and concerned Metis people met with the Government of Alberta to express their deep concern about the plight of many Metis people in Northern Alberta. They pointed out that many Metis people were landless, in extreme poverty, suffering from malnutrition, sickness and their very survival as a people was threatened.

A Royal Commission under the chairmanship of Justice E. W. Ewing, was appointed in February 1933 to examine and report upon conditions for the Government. The Royal Commission report commonly referred to as the HALFBREED COMMISSION REPORT, was completed and presented to the Government in February, 1936. Almost three years later, 1939, the first Metis Colony, (Gift Lake) was organized, followed by a number of others in the following years, 1940 - 1941. Today, they number eight: Paddle Prairie (Keg River) - north of Manning; East Prairie; Big Prairie; and Gift Lake - in the general vicinity of High Prairie; Caslan and Kikino - South of Lac La Biche; and Elizabeth and Fishing Lake Settlements - south of Grande Centre, along the Alberta-Saskatchewan boundary.

The Ewing Commission Report had recommended setting aside Crown Lands for the Metis people: The areas were to contain reasonably good farm land, timber for houses, hunting, fishing, and trapping resources and be free of interference by white settlers. By and large, these recommendations were carried out, bearing in mind that good farm land vested in the Crown was not in great supply even at that time. Settlers were able to construct log houses, hunt, fish, trap and provide basic necessities of life without interference from the larger society. The Commission had pointed

out "....the Government of Alberta did not have any legal or contracted right, but with an actual condition of privation, penury and suffering. The right to live can not be extinguished and the situation as revealed to your Commission seems to call for Governmental guidance and assistance."

Clearly, the formation of the Settlements, the Metis Betterment Act and the Metis Rehabilitation Branch were responses to the recommendations of the Ewing Commission. Again we point out the legal or contractual obligations to the Metis people by the Government of Alberta have not changed from those cited in the Ewing Commission Report. The Metis Betterment Act provides special benefits for Metis people who choose to reside on Crown Lands, within legally-constituted Settlement Associations. Settlers do not acquire land ownership, but hold a Certificate of Occupancy for the lands they occupy or farm.

Annual Budgets are prepared by the Branch who undertakes the task of supervising their expenditure.

Throughout the length of this inquiry, it became clearly evident that the Metis people on the Crown Lands are not 'land hungry' nor do many indicate any great desire to acquire actual ownership and title to the lands. The stories of the ill-fated land scrips of the early 1900's have been passed down to the present generation, and they appear extremely conservative in making any changes in the allocation of Crown Lands.

Nevertheless, some critical and opposing points of view do surface in the transition of the Settlements from basic maintenance units to developing areas. Settlers need more land cleared, more farm equipment,

more livestock and more operating capital. The question is; how?

The Metis Settlement Areas have reserved land ownership to the Crown in order to protect their land claim. However, the agricultural resources of Western Canada have been developed largely through land mortgages; but this source of capital has not been available to the residents of Metis Settlements. No alternative source of capital has ever been arranged for the Settlements to replace the mortgage system.

Because Settlements are situated on Crown Lands, the settlers in the main area are unable or unwilling to seek the conventional source of capital for development. Much of the land in the Eastern Settlements, (Kikino, Caslau, Elizabeth and Fishing Lake) is unfit for good grain production: It can produce forage and does provide fairly good pasture land. Thus, the settlers of necessity are moving into cow-calf livestock enterprises in a fairly orderly manner, but they lack sufficient capital for the accelerated growth necessary to become competitive within this commodity group. Consequently, it is not at all surprising to hear almost unanimous support for a special Metis Development Fund, preferably interest free, where settlers could borrow money to move ahead more quickly.

Many settlers engaged in various agricultural pursuits are aware of the risk and costs involved in financing their projects through conventional lending agencies. (Agricultural enterprises are high risk enterprises by their nature and settlers rarely have any reserves of capital or assets which can be quickly liquidated.) Unable or afraid to borrow the necessary funds to create viable agricultural units, many of the more ambitious settlers have expressed a sense of deep frustration. Some settlers, how-

ever, are not interested in the settlements' agricultural resources. They use the settlements as dormitories; places where they can live, educate their children and be free of the concerns of the society at large such as taxation, ownership of property and rent.

The Committee is aware of the need to point out that conditions in the Alberta Society are much different today than at the time the Ewing Commission made its report. The problems outlined in that report were in large part, due to a severe economic depression which resulted in many groups of people finding themselves in various states of economic deprivation. Today, the same conditions do not apply and it is interesting to note that many Metis people never did move to these Settlements.

Today, the Metis Settlers number about 3,000 people, somewhat less than ten percent of the known identifiable Metis people in Alberta. To administer these settlements the 1969-1970 Budget of the Metis Rehabilitation Branch totalled \$906,468.56 - a considerable increase from the 1962-1963 Budget of \$236,300.00 - even allowing for inflationary dollar values. The largest increases have been in the wages vote - up from \$56,500.00 to \$155,786.23. Another sizable increase has been in Construction materials - up from \$15,700.00 to \$84,471.48, used in the construction of new houses. In addition to this, community pastures have been developed on five Settlements through shared costs under the Government ARDA Agreements.

The problem of leaving the Settlements must of necessity, be extremely difficult and traumatic, because unwittingly the Metis resident on the Settlement becomes a ward of the provincial Government, an almost parallel

situation to the Treaty Indian on a Reservation. This was not the intention of the Ewing Commission Report: "The representatives of the Metis were emphatic in their statements that the Metis wished only such assistance as might be necessary to enable them to establish themselves, and that they were anxiously looking forward to the time when they could be self-supporting." (p.14). Thirty-six years later, it is incumbent upon the Committee to suggest it was not necessarily the feeling of the Commission that Crown Lands for the Metis people should be a perpetual commitment. Nonetheless, the people are in the Settlements, they have ambitions and aspirations, they have needs and have to achieve some of these needs. These points deserve considerable, sympathetic scrutiny.

The governing body of each of the eight Settlements consists of three elected board members. Their function is more consultative than administrative. Line personnel of the Metis Rehabilitation Branch consult the Board members on budgets and operations of the Settlement. However, a great deal of financial responsibilities still remain with the local Supervisors, both in the areas of the Settlement people and the Branch operations. The Supervisor must see that projects are completed and monies accounted for, within the predetermined budget appropriations. He is the man in the middle, and in many ways, it is an extremely demanding and difficult job to fulfill. If things go wrong, he can be the 'fall guy'. Conversely, one study suggested the Supervisor usually retained the responsibility for popular decisions (money) while shunting off the unpopular decisions to the Board.

So the inter-play and interdependence of roles go on in varying degrees of sophistication within limits imposed by the fact that practically all Government monies spent on the Settlements comes down through the Metis Rehabilitation Branch. The Branch is the first to acknowledge the difficult job they are asked to carry out. As early as August 1970, the Director addressed a memorandum to the then Minister of Social Development, outlining some of their future roles in the Metis Settlements. This memorandum, in a form of proposal, suggests a modified form of local self-government within the existing framework of the Metis Betterment Act - Section 9.

The Committee has studied this proposal in considerable detail because it embodies a new approach to the government style in the Metis Settlement. It suggests the Metis Rehabilitation Branch has been keenly aware of the dilemma of what happens when "you do for people" as opposed to: "people do something for themselves". Furthermore, the more you do, the more is expected, a process resulting in effectively stopping the development of personal and collective responsibilities. Finally, to have Metis Settlements or similar areas of Northern Alberta wait for an economically viable tax base before attaining self-government clearly suggests that it will be a denial of any form of self-government for the foreseeable future.

The Committee proposes that any future development of the Metis Settlements, must be clearly identified with the development of people, rather than economic projects or programs. More government monies are not necessarily going to achieve full participation in the larger society,

nor will self-government necessarily be the answer. We recommend extensive negotiations on specific issues between Government and the Settlement people with the object of establishing a relatively autonomous form of self-government in the Settlements. To suggest these negotiations will be relatively straight forward is unrealistic, but we feel the time has come to place the issues before the Settlement people.

The nature of the Metis Development Branch should be what the name implies "developmental". Trained and experienced staff should be recruited, whose functions will be stimulation and communication. They should continually stimulate Metis people to develop economically and socially and they should put them in communication with government and private agencies who can facilitate the development in question.

The following are four principles of community development that should be kept in view while developing a program and recruiting staff: 1/

1. Community development belongs to the people:

The community development worker is only the catalyst. He usually has a number of techniques to stimulate and motivate, but the initiation of action must rest with the people.

2. The community needs ready access to resources:

It is important that initiatives that are stimulated by community development activity can bring some tangible results, otherwise it will be just another meaningless dream.

1/ These principles are taken from E. R. McEwan, Community Development Services for Canadian Indian and Metis Communities. pp. 47-59 where a fuller elaboration is provided.

3. Employment of pilot undertakings to initiate the movement:

Experience abroad has shown that it is advisable to avoid the development of a master plan to encompass all communities at the same time.

4. Community development must begin within the culture and value system of the people and move forward from there:

The United Nations' community development experience has shown that a too rapid introduction of 'change' upsets the value system and has a negative effect on growth and progress of the people.

In making these recommendations, the Committee is cognizant of the role the Government may have to take in this development. For example, we see eight separate and distinct Improvement Districts at the outset, in effect, to build self-government at its lowest level of activity. We can see some Settlements such as Caslau and Kikino pooling resources to employ key staff people. We can see the same thing occurring in the High Prairie district where the three Settlements would hire their personnel on a three-way sharing basis. We can see the Metis Rehabilitation Branch acting as prime consultants to prepare the ground work, to assist the Settlements that desire their help, etc. We see Government in a position to defend a new approach whereby each settlement would be wholly responsible for pre-determined budgets provided to the Settlements in the form of outright municipal grants.

The reasons why the Committee feels the initial step would be the establishment of Improvement Districts are as follows: Present legislation

in the Metis Betterment Act Section - Section 9 - provides for early entry into this form of local self-government. It is not a final objective, but merely a transitional stage of development with some specific date in mind to move into complete self-government. That more services which are handled at the local level, should be the ultimate goal - with responsibilities resting in the local communities. So long as people receiving them, have no control over the quality of the services and/or have no financial control and responsibility, people development will be virtually non-existent or else, role-playing to meet certain pre-conceived expectations developed hundreds of miles away, by "service people", are all the results that can be expected.

Our Committee was afforded the opportunity to examine Native areas in Manitoba and Saskatchewan during the past year.

Manitoba has embarked upon a form of local government very minimal we must admit and without any precise legislation to accommodate the situations. Local communities are given small grants. They elect a Council, they have various Committees, Social Assistance, Employment, Public Works, etc., where people could define their needs and exert their responsibilities.

Saskatchewan has six local Government Authorities in Northern Saskatchewan, as part of their Municipal Act. They are bodies corporate, (they may tax, spend monies, hold lands and equity) they receive special grants on a per capita basis as well as matching local taxes collected by the Authorities. They intend to have at least twenty Local Authorities in full operation by 1975, developing local responsibilities and initiatives,

in effect, using self-government as a community development base.

It became apparent to the Study Group that the single agency system for the Metis Settlement Areas has a double limitation for Metis people. First of all, it confines the residents of the Metis Areas to a "Jack of all trades - master of none" situation. Furthermore, it creates a barrier to government involvement with Metis communities even outside of the Settlements. The reaction of many government agencies is "There is an agency looking after Metis people -----!" The limited responsibility of the Metis Rehabilitation Branch for the Metis Settlements only is not always clearly understood by other government offices.

We acknowledge that the inspection and field services of the Department of Municipal Affairs would have to provide considerable assistance in the preparation of the Settlements for this form of Government. We see a real need to ensure that roads become a responsibility of local councils to the Department of Highways and Transport. We see a need for all agricultural development to be discussed and planned with the specialists in the Department of Agriculture, municipal services with the Department of Municipal Affairs, etc. We can foresee that some or all of the Metis Settlements could, if desirable, take over all the Crown Lands as corporate bodies under the Improvement Districts. They could manage their lands as they see fit and proper, arrange individual or long-term leasing, collective land holdings, or outright land ownership. We can see certain land or properties taxed by the local governing body. We can expect the Metis people to determine their future and the future of these lands. It is unfair to say that none of them wish to own land, it might be sur-

prising to see how many would be prepared to buy their own holdings and accept the attendant responsibilities. These are fairly large orders for both Government and the Metis Settlement residents to accept and carry out.

The alternatives for either Government or the Metis people are not pleasant to consider. We can drift into the Indian Affairs philosophy outwardly professing to help people help themselves, but in practice, denying many basic and fundamental requisites for development. We could hire more personnel to do more for the Settlement people. We can then expect the Metis people (characteristically) to ask for more assistance so that more people can be hired to "do for them" and the escalation process would go on.

If a precise, well-enunciated mandate from the Metis people or their representatives is not forthcoming spontaneously, we feel the Government should take the initiative. We could make more definite recommendations about Government operated stores on four of the Settlements but it is more adviseable that the decision could be made as part of the self-government process. Government cattle herds should likely become the responsibility of the individual bodies corporate; as should machinery and the rest of the physical holdings.

The study group feels strongly that a Metis program must be available to all Metis who need it, not just to those who live in designated areas. The restriction of the programs of the Metis Rehabilitation Branch to Metis living in the Metis Settlement Areas has locked many people in a low employment-high welfare situation. For example, a Metis family can

get housing assistance or participate in Metis work programs only in a Metis Settlement Area. If there is no provision for going beyond the Settlement Area to a viable position in the larger society, then the 'rehabilitation' has been less than complete.

We could make specific recommendations to tidy up the Metis Betterment Act and regulations. There are some obvious corrections that could be made at any time, but these are relatively routine matters. The Act could probably be rewritten and renamed in the next year or so with the direction of self-determination as the main thrust of any change.

There are no serious problems about existing benefits (hunting, fishing, trapping, etc.) and they should be retained if the people so desire. We are attempting to set out some long term objectives and directions because we feel the present developments are inadequate and will ultimately be unworkable.

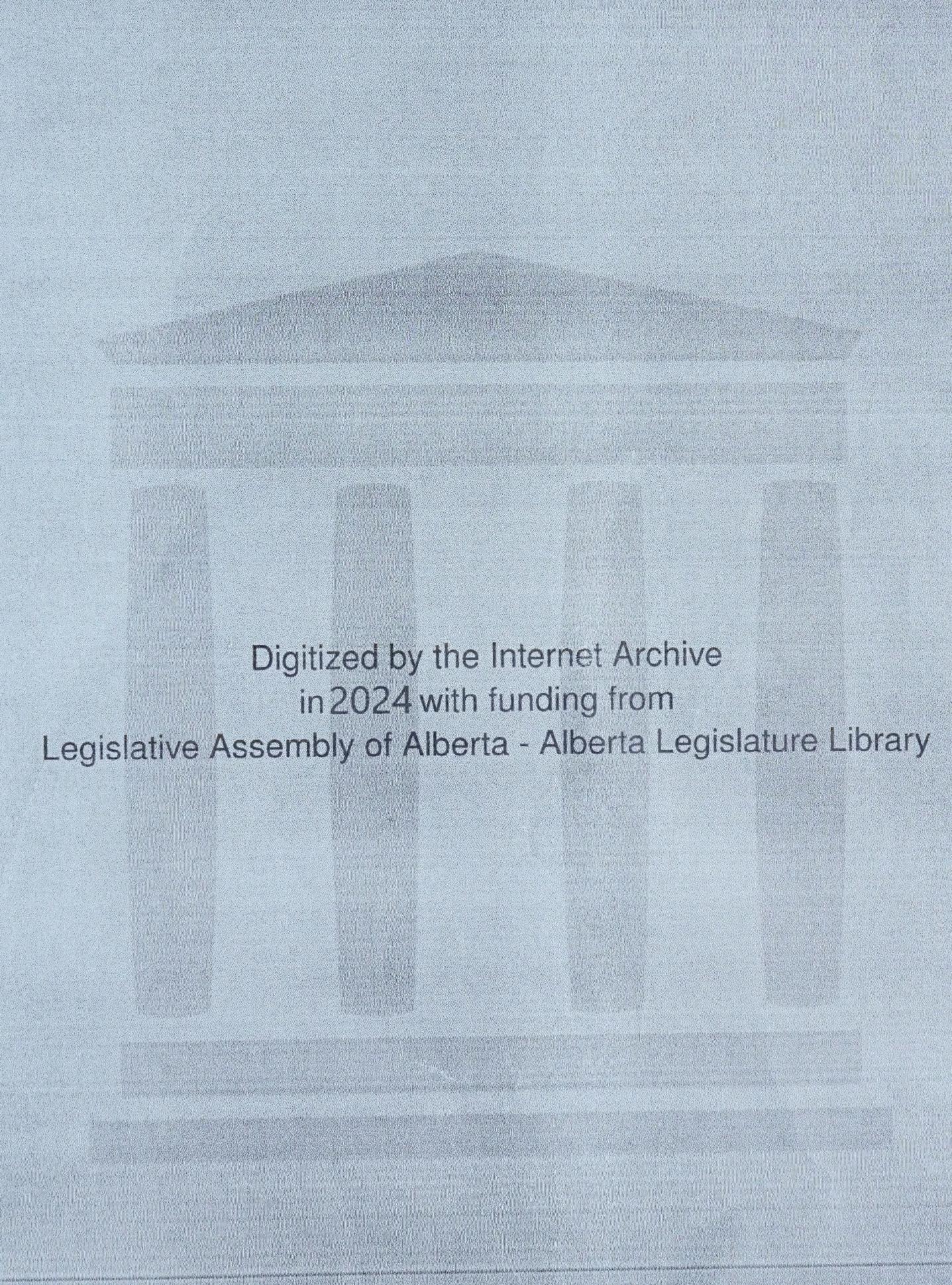
Throughout the course of our deliberations, we have the support and encouragement of the Metis Rehabilitation Branch - its Director and Field Staff at all levels. We had the co-operation of other levels of Government; the Metis Association, its Directors; the Metis Settlement Councils; and last but not least, the Metis people themselves.

SUMMARY

The efforts of government and the Metis people must be directed into every avenue of human and economic development which will effectively eliminate any suggestion of the parent-child relationship. The Metis people of Alberta have been and will continue to be a distinctive part of Alberta's society, and we feel they will respond to sincere and positive overtures to bring about significant changes in their lives.

Therefore the following possibilities should be seriously considered:

- I. The development of local self-government, initially through Improvement Districts, ultimately to complete local self-government.
- II. A deliberate program of Community Development in conjunction with local self-government as well as social, economic and agricultural projects.
- III. Rewrite the Metis Betterment Act to emphasize development at all levels of Metis Society.
- IV. Ensure that Metis people have direct access to elected representatives of the Province - and the financial resources of all government departments.
- V. All disadvantaged Metis people have access to a Metis Development Program.

A faint, grayscale background image of the Alberta Legislature building in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The building is a large, classical-style structure with a prominent central tower and multiple wings. In the distance, the Rocky Mountains are visible under a hazy sky.

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